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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000358

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2020  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: INITIAL READ-OUT OF FEB 25 INDO-PAK TALKS: LOW GOI  
EXPECTATIONS WERE REALIZED

REF: NEW DELHI 328

[11](#). (U) Summary: Indian Foreign Secretary Rao and Pakistani Foreign Secretary Bashir had wide-ranging discussions in New Delhi on February 25, but the set-piece exchanges produced little forward movement in the dialogue. FS Rao's remarks after her meeting focused singularly on terrorism issues and described the meeting as "a first step" towards rebuilding trust. For his part, Bashir reportedly raised Kashmir, Baluchistan and alleged Indian misuse of Indus basin water, and in press remarks questioned the Indian emphasis on terrorism. A joint statement was not issued. Bashir also was to meet with NSA Menon and External Affairs Minister Krishna, and GOI sources confirmed to us talks will continue February 26. No date was set for a next round of meetings. While the content of these talks was predictable, the post-meeting spin will set the tone for any further meetings.  
End Summary.

No Apparent Breakthroughs  
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[12](#). (SBU) Initial media reports indicate that the set-piece exchanges between Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao and her Pakistani counterpart, Salman Bashir, lived up to their modest billing. In a meeting and follow-on expanded discussion that lasted three hours, Rao reportedly gave Bashir a dossier of terror-related allegations against 17 militants; a separate dossier on alleged misdeeds of a Pakistani army officer; and a third dossier on alleged evidence against Lashkar-e-Tayibba militant Ilyas Kashmiri. She also reportedly demanded Pakistani action against alleged Mumbai mastermind Hafiz Saeed, and raised the issue of the recent beheading of two Sikh Pakistani nationals in Pakistan. Media reported February 25 that Bashir would meet EAM Krishna and NSA Menon: GOI sources confirmed to us talks will continue tomorrow.

Rao: Good First Step, But No Composite Dialogue Yet  
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[13](#). (U) In a post-meeting solo press conference, Rao characterized the talks as "useful, detailed, and candid." Rao acknowledged that Pakistan had taken steps against the Mumbai perpetrators, but said they had not gone far enough and pointed out that there were additional leads on Mumbai following the arrest of U.S. citizen David Headley. She also pointed to the continued activities of a variety of jihadi groups in Pakistan that incite violence against India. On talks, she called the meeting a "first step in a graduated step-by-step process" of improved Indo-Pakistani ties. She confirmed that Pakistan asked to resume the Composite Dialogue, but said the time was not right because the sides need to "build an environment of trust and confidence." Rao said the parties had agreed "to keep in touch," and that Bashir had invited her to Islamabad, but she did not specify a date for future talks.

14. (U) Initial Indian media reporting of FS Bashir's press remarks after the meeting noted his assertion that Kashmir was discussed "extensively not briefly." Bashir also declared "Pakistan intends to restore good ties with India and welcomes India's focus on terror, but it is unrealistic and we feel even counter-productive to link the talks with the 26/11 attacks alone." He characterized Indian dossiers on Hafez Saeed as "more literature than evidence."

It's a Start  
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15. (C) In the run-up to the February 25 talks, GOI sources had made it clear to us (reftel) and local journalists that they were approaching the talks with modest expectations and they predicted no breakthroughs. Pakistani High Commissioner Malik told the Ambassador that the fact that the two sides were talking was more important than the actual content of the meeting. He stressed that the lack of an agenda gave both sides the opportunity to make the points they needed to make, given their competing interests and domestic constituencies.

16. (C) The post-meeting spin on both sides will set the tone that will affect the timing and content of future exchanges. As both Foreign Secretary Rao and High Commissioner Malik noted, the hard part will be moving on to substantive exchanges that advance the dialogue. We expect the GOI to assure its public that counterterrorism was India's focus, but to do so in a manner that will not rule out further talks in Islamabad.

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Foreign Secretary Rao's Statement  
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17. (U) Begin text of statement:

In response to my invitation, the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Mr. Salman Bashir, is in India leading a 13 member delegation. Mr. Bashir and I held talks this morning assisted by our respective delegations.

My invitation to the Pakistani Foreign Secretary was in keeping with the Government of India's firm conviction that we must not shut the door on dialogue with Pakistan, and that such dialogue, if it gathers momentum, holds tremendous potential for the progress of the people of our region. The sincere and genuine efforts we have made in past years in this direction have been repeatedly thwarted by acts of terrorism, culminating in the barbaric attack in Mumbai. The Mumbai attack erased the trust and confidence that the two countries had painstakingly built during the period 2004-07. The recent Pune attack, which is still under investigation, is yet another reminder that our citizens remain vulnerable to terrorist violence.

We went into today's talks with an open mind but fully conscious of the limitations imposed by the large trust deficit between the two countries. In line with our graduated and step by step approach, our aims were modest: we had a useful discussion during which I spelt out forthrightly our concerns on terrorism emanating from Pakistan against India. I told my Pakistani counterpart that terrorism cannot advance any cause but the cause of senseless violence and that it is the solemn duty of states to eliminate all terrorist groups operating from their soil regardless of their ideology or agenda. While acknowledging the steps taken so far by Pakistan to bring the Mumbai perpetrators to book, I pointed out these did not go far enough to unravel the full conspiracy behind the Mumbai attack and to award exemplary punishment to all culprits. I stressed the importance of expeditious action by Pakistan on these issues including by following up on the leads that have emerged following the arrest in the US of David Coleman Headley and

Tahawuur Hussain Rana. It was pointed out that the Mumbai attack was a symptom of a larger problem - that of continued existence and unhindered activities of organizations such as Lashkar-e-Toiba/Jamaat ud Dawa, Hizb ul Mujahideen etc from Pakistani territory and territory under Pakistan's control to perpetrate terrorist violence against India. It was emphasized that the Government of India could not but take a serious note of such actions as it was duty bound to ensure the security of its citizens.

At the same time, we said it was the duty of the Government of Pakistan to take effective action to dismantle and put an end to the activities of such organizations. The issue of terrorist infiltration and ceasefire violations across the line of control and international border was also taken up. We called upon Pakistan to investigate the claim made by a hitherto unknown organization, Lashkar-e-Toiba al Almi and a separate claim by Ilyas Kashmiri owning responsibility for the recent Pune blast. Additional information on terrorist activities against India emanating from Pakistan was also handed over for investigation and appropriate action.

Pakistan raised certain other issues and we responded appropriately, reiterating our national position on these issues.

I told the Pakistani Foreign Secretary that we have all along believed in the approach to resolve all outstanding issues between the two countries through bilateral dialogue in an atmosphere free of terror and violence. If we are to build upon the past discussion at an appropriate time, trust and confidence between us must be restored.

We have set out to take a first step towards rebuilding trust and I believe my meeting with the Pakistani Foreign Secretary has constituted that first step. We have agreed to remain in touch and continue endeavor to restore trust. It was also decided to address urgent humanitarian issues.

End Text of Statement.  
ROEMER